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A
NATIONAL CHURCH

A SERMON

PREACHED IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY

On December 4, 1898

BY

C. W. FURSE, M.A.

*Archdeacon and Canon of Westminster, formerly Principal of the
Theological College, Cuddesdon*

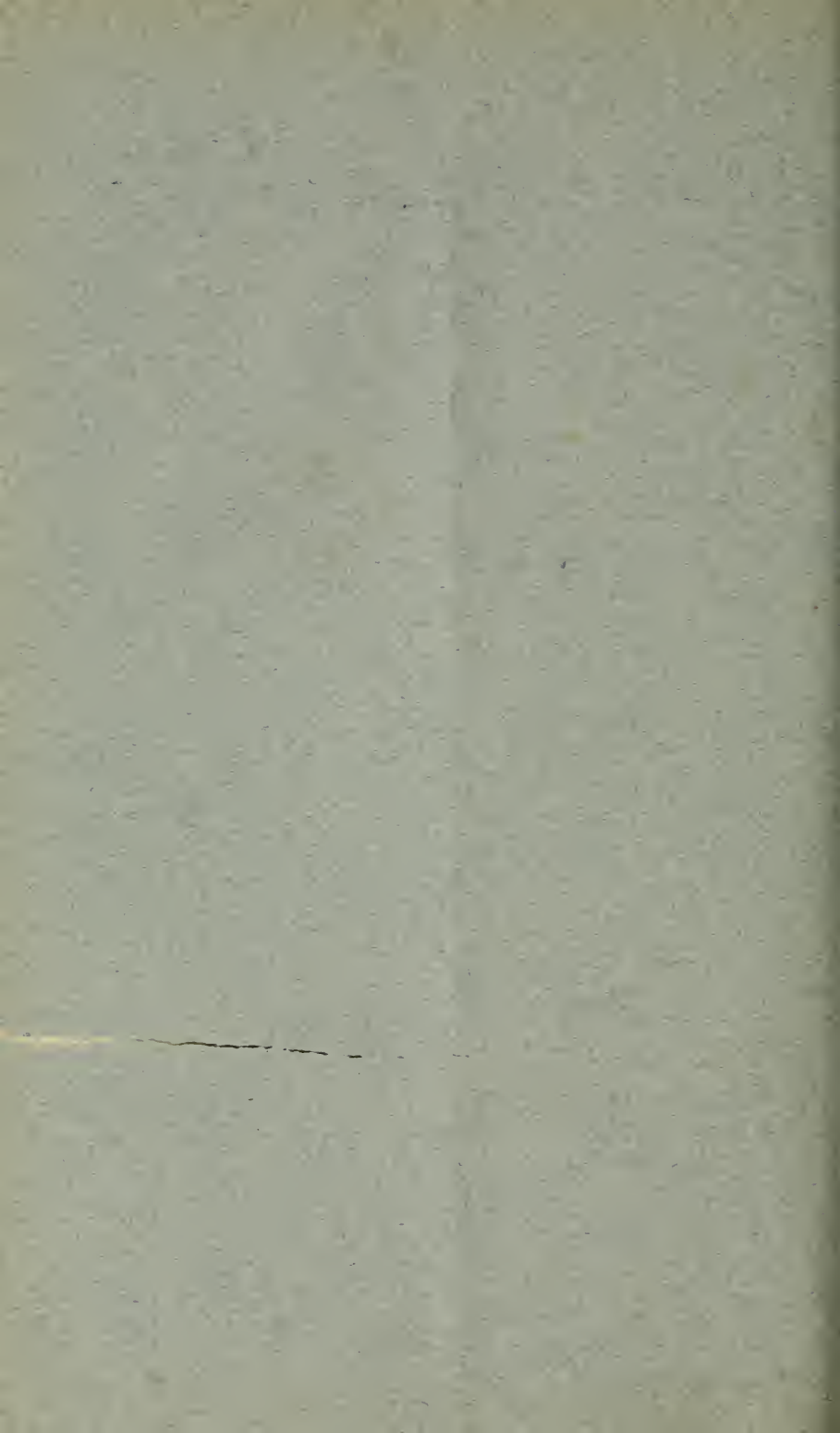
London

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED

NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

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PRICE SIXPENCE



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PREFACE

THE admirable letter to Lord Halifax, entitled *Cui Bono?* by the Rev. H. Hensley Henson has already reached a third edition. Owing to my absence from London, I did not know of its existence until this sermon had been planned and more than half written, nor had I read more than a few lines of it when the sermon was delivered. I have since read it with grateful appreciation, and trust that it will be widely read and pondered by English churchmen and churchwomen.

I feel bound by a painful obligation to call attention to two small volumes, entitled *Devotions in Honour of St. Thomas of Canterbury*, and *Catholic Prayers for Church of England People*, which are published by W. Knott, 26, Brook Street, Holborn. The latter bears the signature A. H. S., and came to a third edition in August, 1895. The Editor says, "The history of this little book from the first has been one of an ever-increasing popularity." I could not allude to this added evidence of disloyalty to the Church of England in my sermon

without using language unseemly in a church. The insolence displayed by publishing such a book for the use of "Church of England people" can only be understood by a glance at the volume itself. Let the reader mark pages 24, 48, 104, 130, 140, 180, 185. It appears that this book has not been hid in a corner, but has been published and circulated for at least seven years in the Diocese of London.

Dec. 9, 1898.

A NATIONAL CHURCH

ST. JOHN XVIII. 36.

Jesus said, My Kingdom is not of this world.

THE Kingdom of Christ is an Advent subject. A National Church is part of that Kingdom : and of our privilege and duty as members of this Nation and of this Church I propose to speak.

Our Lord's method of teaching is often a statement of parallel truths. There is no compromise : that would dull the edge of truth. Nor is there exaggeration : that would offend reason, and contradict man's experience. This principle of the Divine Master's teaching holds good of purely spiritual subjects ; and, if it do so in the individual relations between God and man, which are unique and absolute, much more should we expect the same line to guide us in relation to facts and persons and institutions in the life around us. Here, in St. John's account of Christ before Pilate, we see our Lord dealing with a man in office and power. He claims to be a King : He avouches His Kingdom so plainly that Pilate knows what the word means, for he returns to the

Jews, and says, "Behold your King! Shall I crucify your King?" Again, Christ's definition of His Kingdom, though negative in one point, "My Kingdom is not of this world," is positive in other respects, "My Kingdom." "Art thou a King then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a King."

Now I will take it for granted that we all know fairly well in what respects the Kingdom of Christ is not of this world: how it differs in temper, motive, intention, foresight and moral victories from the best nations of the world. My subject is, that the Church is a Kingdom *in the world*, and has relations to the world which imply mutual obligations one to the other.

The idea of the Church is a society and power with vast supernatural authority and influence, whose functions are to glorify God in these two ways, by upholding at all odds the truth which He has revealed, and by converting the world to obedience to that truth. This is the first and sublimest duty of the Church. It is paramount, but *not exclusive*. In converting the world there are many considerations. Its converters are not angels: they are men. Or, if we rise to the highest sphere of moral and spiritual influence, the living Person of the Holy Ghost, even here the Divine Converter, being invisible and inaudible, uses the ministry of men towards each other. The Church, in that it is a Kingdom, a society, involves duties and obligations, not divine and supernatural only, but also human, natural and social. Sympathy with man as man, considerateness, moral influence, candour, patience, are daily duties in a Church-

man's life. They are not superseded, much less excluded, by the possession of sacramental gifts.

Again, a National Church has duties in special relation to the nations in which it exists, and to different classes, policies, temperaments, and antecedents in the history, education, and even hereditary prejudices of the nation. The Church receives privilege and security from the State. The State has an indefeasible right to claim corresponding duties from the Church. Christ Himself recognised the claims of the Jewish State, and even the *de facto* authority of the Roman State, although the patriotic Jew denied it *de jure*. No one with open eyes can read the life of St. Peter and St. Paul without noting their discriminating judgment in dealing with national and local questions. It is not for nothing that St. Paul's mind is not stereotyped for us in scholastic dogmas, but freely expressed, under the inspiring influence of the Holy Ghost, in letters to Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, and to a gentleman and slave-holder like Philemon. His affectionate mention of some fifty men and women by name, and his glad confession of being a debtor both to the Greek and the barbarian, gives delightful evidence of his broad humanity, and of that appreciative sense of his citizen-life which made him a Christian man *in* the world but not *of* the world.

Brethren, do you not think that there is good sense in a remark not seldom made among us, and not unkindly either, that the clergy of the Church of England would do well to know the mind of laymen better; and even that it would be good for them to live the

life of a layman longer, not as a stripling only, but as a lay *man* (if their financial position made it possible), and thus increase in knowledge and wisdom, before they stood up to convert and teach their fellow-citizens in the world? In one view the English pastor and priest is a single solitary man struck by the voice of the Master crying unto him, "Watchman, what of the night?"—or kneeling alone in prayer, his "life hid with Christ in God"—or standing before the altar, with his back to the people, and his face turned upward to the great High Priest in heaven—or as the lonely shepherd intent on recovering a single soul and bearing it on his shoulder homeward. But again he looks abroad, and his heart is enlarged by the thought of other sheep which are not of this fold lying on a bare hill far off, and to the untutored eye looking more like a dead stone than a living thing; and to-morrow he will find himself moving to and fro in the crowded thoroughfares of the world, and, like St. Paul, becoming "all things to all men, that he may by all means save some."

And now I ask if it be reasonable to suppose that sympathetic appreciation of the national character and temperament on the part of a National Church is incompatible with the severe and uncompromising authority of the Catholic Church? Yet, to hear some men talk, and to see what they do, it seems as if they thought it was a time-serving and worldly spirit which would cherish such a thought.

Years ago I asked the father and founder of one of our earliest communities of Sisters, whether he thought they

cared for the National Church. His answer was, "The older ones do; I do not know that the younger ones do." It is possible that the same temper may influence many clergymen and laymen in the scant regard they have for what I will call the $\eta^{\circ}\theta os$, the national character, the temperament, even the taste of the Anglo-Saxon race. To such minds a scholastic definition, a mediæval ceremony, and even a form of devotion more Roman in doctrine and sentiment than Catholic and Anglican, will be insisted on with wilful disregard of the spirit of the English liturgy and the religious convictions of the English nation. Such have been, and are, and will be the unhappy issues of this unfilial, unpatriotic, un-English habit of mind.

Again, I once heard an English Bishop say in apology for the abstinence of Bishops from forwardness to lead, "English people do not like to be *led*." Well, certainly they do not like to be driven! Now, if we let ourselves live in disregard of the character of our National Church, it will follow that our way of teaching what we call Catholic truth and Catholic practice will not be the wise method of the *teacher*, but the positive peremptory tone of one who will impose his dogma on the dumb disciple. "The Church says it." That is enough for such a man: he catches up the word "Church" or "Catholic," without the historical knowledge or discernment of a real authority, and by and by he will give out what was never more than a rule of equity as a law of absolute obligation; with more or less learning, as the case may be, he will become despotic, and speak and act as if by

right he had dominion over our faith. Then there will arise a public opinion in his packed congregation, which becomes practically *compulsion*, although he may with honesty, so far as the letter goes, deny that he compels. I take this line of conduct to run counter to the mind of the National Church of England. The issue of such an innovation is a perilous possibility ! Christianity will not then act as leaven penetrating the mass of human life, and converting the world to its own substance ; and the National Church will not become one body and one bread. She may lapse into a condition where she will be a pillar indeed, soaring high, and pointing upwards as a spire seen from far to rise like a needle out of a flat country, but not like the growth of this Abbey Church (I am only using it as a symbol), with its Catholic and national histories spreading out side by side of the less ancient but more imposing seat of the Parliament of the nation. In plain prose, the laity of the nation may be alienated from their Church. The Church may become more Italian than English, and more fondly stretching out her hands eastward for the reunion of Christendom (an event devoutly to be wished) than anxious about creating disunion at home, greater disunion, I believe it to be, than in the sixty years of my manhood I have ever known among us.

Fellow-churchmen, let me not be misunderstood. We may be loyal to our National Church and to its Book of Common Prayer without using optimistic language about that book, and calling it our "incomparable liturgy," as I have often heard it called in Church Congresses and elsewhere. For myself, I have never used such language, and

never shall. But, however equivocal and intentionally tolerant of divers interpretations some of its language appear to one man, and over-dogmatic and rigid to another, there is a strong, masculine, English character stamped on it both in respect of ritual and doctrine, which a fair-minded intelligent churchman will recognise.

I have just named ritual. It is said by some that ritual is a small thing, and that people soon get used to it, whatever it be. Do they? The reasonable plea for ritual is, first, that it expresses visibly something more precious than itself; and, secondly, that things which are seen impress the mind more acutely than things which are heard.¹ This is the true apology for ritual, and its advocates reasonably insist upon this function. But let them observe that this cuts both ways. In a congregation of a thousand people many more are likely to be offended by irritating ritual, and by ceremonies more Italian than English, than those who will detect unsound doctrine in a sermon. Given a strong personality in the preacher, and sufficient novelty in his subject and opinions, how many in a mixed congregation nowadays will be made anxious by questionable doctrine?

This is a canon of good ritual, which, I trust, we shall all agree on. Ritual is an expression of a truth behind. I will apply to ritual some well-known words, which their splendid author used of another subject. Good ritual should be, as far as possible, "what may be called colourless, like air or water. It is but the medium through

¹ "Segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem
Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus."

HORACE, A. P.

which the soul sees Christ, and the soul as little rests upon it and contemplates it, as the eye can see the air. When men are bent on holding it (as it were) in their hands, curiously inspecting, analysing, and so aiming at it, they are obliged to colour and thicken it, that it may be seen and touched." How far a great deal of the ritual which has been developing in the Church of England for nearly half a century regards this principle I leave you to judge.

Brethren, whatever be your individual judgment on these present matters of controversy, this much we shall allow. They are grave and serious. To call them mere passing troubles, occurring in places few and far between, of recent growth and shortlived, is language unworthy of the subject, and inadequate to the case. Prosecutions in law courts and imprisonments of clergymen gave a cheap triumph to the Erastian. The fire has been burning steadily with increasing force for at least thirty or forty years. Nothing of it is recent except a puff of ugly and dirty smoke which has been raised by a vulgar agitation. At last the fire itself has caught the watchman's eye. Why not before? It is not for me to say. How to deal with it is a graver matter. May God give the Overseers of the Church in England a right judgment, enabling them to speak and do the truth in love!

To evade the main points of ritual and doctrine, as if they were superseded by zeal in work and sanctity of life is not statesmanlike or even reasonable. The truth of the Bible and of the Church would not be to-day our precious inheritance after two thousand years of continuous history,

had truth and error been determined only by the moral and spiritual character of innovators in various epochs of the Church.

A minority of earnest men fighting without men of genius to lead them (as other movements have enjoyed), and advancing first by skirmishers and then by steady lines of closed ranks in open daylight, without defeat, for some forty years, is to generous eyes a fascinating sight ! But reason takes up the unwelcome task of bringing sentiment to the bar of judgment. Dr. Arnold taught us years ago, that the fascination of Hannibal in the Punic wars was not to be let to warp our judgment, for it was for the welfare of the world that Hannibal should lose and Rome should win. Many of us will remember, how in the American Civil War, the enthusiasts for the cause of the heroic Lee and Stonewall Jackson were bidden by the wisest men in England to remember, that it made for the happiness of the nations that the Confederates (the "Rebels" as they were called by the Northerners) should lose, and the union of the American nation should be preserved.

He will be a bold man, and not over wise, who will presume to say how this course of things will run.

But "surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secrets unto His servants the prophets." One hope I venture to express, and with this I close. We have heard the utterances of several Bishops to the clergy in their dioceses ; but most or all of them, with one notable exception, have been fragmentary and allusive. It cannot be disrespectful to express a hope that we shall without much delay hear *the united voice of all our Bishops*

in one pronouncement addressed to the clergy and laity of our National Church. I am not sanguine enough to suppose that the union of our Bishops in one solemn act will remove our difficulties; but such an act will have a moral effect on us all, which is much to be desired. In the confidence of that hope I pray that our fathers in God will have the courage and wisdom to face the fact of the perilous disunion within the National Church of England, which is a vital member of the Kingdom of Christ, which shall have no end.









